

Dance review: Frontier Danceland puts life under the microscope



Sides successfully makes use of the medium of the camera to provoke thought and evoke feeling. PHOTO: ALFONSE CHIU

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Review

DANCE

SIDES

Frontier Danceland

Sistic Live, last Friday (Jan 29)

Conducting life through cameras, as everyone has had to do during the Covid-19 pandemic, can make one feel subject to an intense and frustrating scrutiny.

Sides by Frontier Danceland ratchets this up a notch, as dancers perform as if under a microscope or are buried in apples.

Dancers' Locker, the annual showcase for the company dancers, went online last year due to the pandemic. This year, the company continues the trend with Sides, which usually presents repertoire from local and international choreographers, who would work with the company over several weeks.

Its Covid-19 edition is a digital double bill by two home-grown choreographers, Zhuo Zihao and Chiew Peishan, whose established interest in incorporating the camera into their works makes them ideal for this production.

In Zhuo's B().I().O(), Ma Yueru dons a lab coat and peers through a lens that frames the other dancers as tiny bodies under a microscope.

It is a rollercoaster of contemplation, reflection and chuckles as personal stories are revealed through the dancing or narration. Yet the camera simultaneously distances.

Zhuo makes use of the medium's ability to capture and delay time by superimposing different duets over each other, forming a multi-coloured sextet that is both ghostly and dehumanising.

The selective focus of the lens scrutinises each dancer and their decisions in turn while blurring out the periphery, all under Ma's omnipresent clinical gaze.

"Superstar singer" Mark Robles directs his back-up dancers; Tan Xin Yen does high kicks in a long tulle tutu; the limp body of Sammantha Yue is puppeteered through the space; and Konrad Plak, body covered in scribbled markings, lures the other dancers closer to him with serpentine movements.

Keigo Nozaki's pan-faced humour is a highlight as he alternates between the story of how he started learning ballet because he wanted the reward of a soda after class and sharing the brain science behind decision making.

Chiew's Apple Diary capitalises on the camera's ability to reveal hidden objects, such as an apple behind plastic, or draw connections by cutting between similar images, such as the cover of a well and the pits in a wall.

Chiew, Frontier's assistant artistic director, puts the dancers in unexpected places, from listening to the rustling of leaves in a secluded field, to having a conversation with full-bodied gestural movement language in the middle of Orchard Road.

The choreographer's suppressed frustration is felt through the compelling images. Tan, buried in a tub under a pile of apples, emerges and spits one out.

Gagged by an apple and surrounded by bleak whiteness, she traces the outline of a table while Nozaki persistently and pointedly ignores her. Each time she offers the apple to him, he rejects it.

Dancers rhythmically fall, climb and press against a grey pitted wall only to find that these are not even real, but rather photocopies of the circular indents.

These copies gradually fall to reveal photographs of more apples: smashed, bruised and broken.

All of this is interspliced with black-and-white excerpts from Chiew's 2018 work Should I kill myself or have a cup of coffee?.

Sides successfully makes use of the medium of the camera to provoke thought and evoke feeling.

Book it/Sides

WHERE: Sistic Live

WHEN: Till Saturday (Feb 6), 11.59pm

ADMISSION: Pay-as-you-wish, \$10 onwards at www.sistic.com.sg/events/SIDES2020
